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ABSTRACT

In spring 1997, a project used MicroCase, a computer-based statistical analysis and data retrieval system, to offer an American Government class to distance students at Iowa's Kirkwood Community College (KCC). Students participated in the course at one of the college's 10 learning centers via a statewide fiber-optic network. MicroCase provided the students with powerful statistical tools, including multiple regression, analysis of variance, and factor analysis; large databases; and a framework in which they can learn to use such resources. The 65 students enrolled in the course were expected to complete computer-based exercises related to foundations of American government, civil rights and liberties, governmental processes and institutions, and public policy, while a variety of assessments were used to gauge the effect of the program, perceived benefits, and student progress. Fifty-six of the students completed the course, an above-average completion rate compared with KCC's on-campus and distance courses, and student feedback was quite favorable. Although technical problems related to a lack of time on the network, damaged computer disks, and differences among center operating systems were encountered, students, nevertheless, received higher-than-average grades and expressed high levels of satisfaction and interest. An appendix provides a sample of student data analysis completed in the course using MicroCase. (BCY)

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American Goverment:
An Introduction to Using MicroCase with Distance Learners

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Kirkwood Community College

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ABSTRACT

American Government
An Introduction Using MicroCase with Distance Learners

A Presentation at the League for Innovation
National Technology Conference
Atlanta, Georgia
October 14, 1997

By

Dr. William H. Rosberg
Social Science Department
Kirkwood Community College
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

The author describes the use of a micro-computer based statistical analysis and data retrieval system over a distance learning network at Kirkwood Community College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

The Article includes a description of the variety of distance learning options available at Kirkwood and figures on enrollment in courses offered via these systems in the Spring 1997 academic term.

The major focus of the article is student utilization of computer assisted instructional materials at distant sites and relative success in their inclusion.

The author deals with needed support to make such a system work and makes several suggestions that should encourage student success.

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Distance Learning at Kirkwood:

Distance education at Kirkwood Community College originated more than 25 years ago with the initiation of course offerings using an audio-only link via a 4-wire telephone connection to sites in other communities in our service area. We formally went into distance learning with the creation of the Kirkwood Telecommunications System in 1978. With a combination of local funding and funding from the Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration's Public Telecommunications Facilities Program, we were able to switch to a Television-based format. Today, we use a variety of systems to deliver these televised classes:

- Telelink - Microwave - a 12 gigahertz interactive microwave network that links classrooms in seven counties. The system uses two-way video.
- Instructional Television Fixed Service Networks - a 2.5 ghz broadcast television signal that can be picked up from any line of site point within a 20 mile radius of the transmitter. This system operates on 4 channels at the main campus, with six

additional channels at various repeater/transmitter sites. Special FM radio response transmitters at the receive sites allow student interaction via audio response.

- The Secondary School Network - ITFS based, allowing classes to be offered in area school districts. Offerings include both high school courses the schools offer cooperatively and "early bird" college credit offerings. During non-school hours, these sites are also used for both credit and non-credit programs within the community.
- The Urban Network - Related to the Secondary School Network, allows urban and local school districts to share resources through Kirkwood, the Grant Wood Area Education Agency, and the schools themselves. This allows offering of credit and non credit offerings by the college after school hours.
- Kirkwood Business Network - Receive sites have been installed at selected business locations in the area. This allows employees to take part in both credit and non-credit offerings. The network also is used to deliver satellite teleconferences.
- Cable Network - The Kirkwood eaducational cable channel is seen in over 64,000 homes subscribing to cable teleavision. The central objective of the cable TV network is to offer college credit telecourses both in semester and block formats. This allows students the convenience of earning college credit through home study at their own pace.
- The Iowa Communications Network - The college also serves as a regional switching center for the Iowa Communications Network, a statewide, multi-channel fiber obptics network. Through this network, two-way video, voice, or data information can be transmitted between any of Kirkwood's centers and the main campus. The

ICN has points of presence in each of Iowa's 99 counties in Iowa. The network has the capability of providing up to twelve 45 megabit duplex channels between any county site and regional hub and up to 48 45 megabit duplex channels between the regional switching centers and the main switching hub at Iowa Public Television.

During the Spring 1997 semester, when this program was offered, Kirkwood had 57 courses offered on one or more of the above systems. There were 2,353 registrations, and an average class size of 41.3 students.

Kirkwood Community College operates their own instruction/learning centers in each of the seven counties in their service area. At the present time, they have ten such centers in operation in addition to business, school district, and correctional institution sites also tied into their network.

Computer Availability:

To make the Micro Case American Government program possible, I needed to have computer availability at each of the sites at which the class was offered. I chose to use Kirkwood's own ten learning centers as the basis for this first offering. This was done because the college could guarantee computer availability and access for enrolled students at each site.

Micro Case

The Micro Case Analysis System is available in two formats:

- The first is a comprehensive analysis system for social science research across the whole range of the social sciences. It is resident on our main frame computer and

allows in-depth statistical analysis, word processing, and graphic presentation of data. The total package, for institution-wide usage, is available for an initial fee of approximately $2,500.00 and annual update fees of about $1,200.00. Kirkwood has had this system on line for several years and it has been quite popular with students. It is easy to access, easy to use, and the available on-line assistance in data interpretation makes usage easy for the instructor.

- The second format is a "cut-down version" that is available on disc for student use. It provides smaller data sets, limits statistical manipulation and analysis to parametric statistical analysis and does not have a resident word-processing program. This second version is provided with student workooks that suggest areas of exploration, and provide the necessary statistical data and tools to allow students to analyze the results they achieve after accessing and manipulating the data.

For purposes of initial introduction of Micro Case at Kirkwood's remote locations, it was decided to go with the second format for primary instruction, with the instructor inputting more complex requests at the site of the main computer, when utilization of the whole program was required. Since the "cut down" version allowed for Univariate Distributions, Scatterplots, Multiple Regression, Curve Fitting, Analysis of Variance, Factor Analysis and most basic statistical measures, such as Coefficient of Correlation, Pearson's r, and others, the latter option - inputting a request for additional analysis was rarely used.

The basic text/workbook, including a student data/program disc was sold by our bookstore for approximately $20.00. The sixteen exercises covered all the basic areas dealt with in the standard American Government Course:

- Foundations - three exercises
- Civil Liberties and Rights - two exercises
- The Process of Government - six exercises
- Governmental Institutions - four exercises
- Public Policy - one exercise (this could be modified in many ways to cover a number of policy options and issues)

The author chose to use the text/workbook with a basic introductory text, O'Connor and Sabato, (1997) American Government: Continuity and Change: 1997 ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon. When offering the course on system for the first time, the text used was Frantzich and Perry (1994) American Government: The Political Game Madison, Wisconsin: Brown and Benchmark. A switch was made to the O'Connor and Sabato text because they had developed a correlated instructor's manual/test bank that incorporated material from both their text and from MicroCase American Government.

A key to understanding the significance of MicroCase to students at off campus sites is their ability to do their own hands-on research on politics and government. In the initial exercises, one does little more than would be expected in a computer-based tutorial – hardly a major innovation or advance in student learning. The real growth occurs as students learn to frame their own research and develop their own studies by "mining" the

data files available. The instructor's role has been that of facilitator. I help them to frame research questions, to choose aggregate data sets from the MicroCase files, and to select specific variables that let them measure the phenomena they are examining. As they do so, they are developing skills they will use throughout their academic careers.

Are these skills unique to MicroCase? Clearly not but MicroCase provides students with powerful statistical tools, large data bases, and a framework in which they can learn to use such resources. These resources had not been previously available nor had instruction in their use been provided at our off-campus sites.

The Class:

The class was taught using the Iowa Communications Network and provided instruction simultaneously to students enrolled in Cedar Rapids - 21; Iowa City - 21; Washington - 4; Williamsburg - 5; Tipton -3; Vinton - 5; Belle Plaine - 2; and Monticello - 4. Total enrollment was 65.

The students were expected to complete the computer-based exercises. These exercises were discussed in class and were evaluated as an integral part of the course. In addition, a variety of assessment tools were used to evaluate both impact on students and perceived benefits. I utilized a series of instruments developed as a participant in a Classroom Assessment Techniques program to continually evaluate both progress and attitude. Overall, responses were quite positive. Feedback provided by students has led to revision

for greater clarity in presentation of some statistical tests, such as probability and Craemer's V, but in general responses were quite favorable.

56 of the 65 students enrolled successfully completed the course. Nine withdrew. This is higher than average completion for an introductory course in the Social Sciences taught either on campus, in a traditional format or on our distance learning systems. Of the 56 who completed, two were exempted from the computer based assignments due to severe visual impairment (ADA certified.) 54 therefore completed the computer portion of the course. Of the 54, 50%, 27 students went beyond the required exercises and submitted supplemental work. Several options existed for "extra credit" but none of the others attracted more than one or two students. In an appendix to this paper, I have included a sample of the sort of computer work, above and beyond basic requirements that students submitted. The included sample is one of six submitted by this student beyond the basic course requirements.

The question he was examining dealt with changes in confidence in government, especially in Congress and the Executive Branch. You will note he chose to analyze data from 1973-1993. He had examined current confidence levels (1994 & 1995 data) as part of a basic exercise. He looked at age, geographic region, race, and political party in terms of both Congress and the Executive Branch. This sort of in-depth analysis would not have been possible without the skills he mastered in this course.

Technical Problems Encountered:

The worst technical problems encountered involved class time to communicate. I disliked using class time to deal with individual student problems, but conversely, these problems needed immediate attention. The structure of the Iowa Communications Network meant that class was terminated exactly at the time specified and the system allocated for other purposes. As a result, often consultation with individual students was by telephone. As a result, I developed a much healthier respect than I have ever had before for the work done by technical support staff for computer software.

Student would periodically destroy or damage their discs. Agreement with MicroCase to allow discs to be copied and replaced was essential. All in all, no more problems of this type occurred than I have encountered when teaching this same course on campus.

In spite of the fact that all of the centers are operated by Kirkwood Community College, the operating systems used and configuration of computers differed. It took a substantial amount of time to determine just what these differences were and how they affected the operation of the program. They key differences involved accessing student discs and printing materials, but still, a good deal of time was spent in this fashion.

Was the Program Successful:

Direct Comparisons of classes is dubious at best, but overall, grades in this class appear higher than the historic average for American Government students at Kirkwood. Clearly student expressions of satisfaction and interest were up and I feel student understanding of the political process also benefited from the addition of MicroCase. I consider the addition to be a positive one and plan to continue its use.

I would stress that a successful distance learning course utilizing remote laboratory facilities requires a high degree of structure and technological support. Special attention must be given to distant students who hesitate to ask questions. It would be quite easy to leave them far behind. Regular submission of required exercises and required assignments, beginning early in the semester, helped to identify potential problems. Immediate response to these problems by telephone or in person helped to keep things progressing well.

I feel the program was successful. I would have no hesitation about repeating the experience. Several of my colleagues in the Social Sciences, most notably a Sociologist, are following my lead and will be using MicroCase on our distance learning systems.

APPENDIX

A SAMPLE OF STUDENT DATA ANALYSIS

USING MICRO CASE

The percentage of people who had a great deal of confidence in Congress dropped dramatically, from 1973 compared to 1993, in every category except for African Americans who only dropped slightly. The percentage of people who has some confidence in Congress stayed relatively the same, but the percentage that had hardly any confidence increased greatly in every category in 1993. The percentage of people that had a great deal of confidence in the Executive Branch in 1973 decreased considerably in 1993, stayed fairly the same in only some confidence, and increased in hardly any confidence. For the Executive Branch the numbers for African Americans and Democrats stayed relatively the same from 1973 to 1993 in all three confidence categories.

Controls:
4)AGE : UNDER 30
Row Var.: 16)CONGRESS Column Var.: 1)YEAR

	1973	1993	Missing	TOTAL
GREAT DEAL	85	15	0	100
	22.5	8.1		17.8
ONLY SOME	240	100	0	340
	63.7	53.8		60.4
HARDLY ANY	52	71	0	123
	13.8	38.2		21.8
Missing	6	116	0	122
TOTAL	377	186	0	563
	100.0	100.0		100.0

Cross-Tabulation -- File: P1973-93

ntrols:
4)AGE : 30-50
Row Var.: 16)CONGRESS Column Var.: 1)YEAR

	1973	1993	Missing	TOTAL
GREAT DEAL	127	32	0	159
	24.0	6.8		15.9
ONLY SOME	315	242	0	557
	59.4	51.5		55.7
HARDLY ANY	88	196	0	284
	16.6	41.7		28.4
Missing	12	241	0	253
TOTAL	530	470	0	1000
	100.0	100.0		100.0

Cross-Tabulation -- File: P1973-93

ntrols:
4)AGE : 50 & OVER
Row Var.: 16)CONGRESS Column Var.: 1)YEAR

	1973	1993	Missing	TOTAL
GREAT DEAL	140	26	0	166
	25.6	7.0		18.1
ONLY SOME	325	184	0	509
	59.4	49.7		55.5
HARDLY ANY	82	160	0	242
	15.0	43.2		26.4
Missing	28	218	0	246
TOTAL	547	370	0	917
	100.0	100.0		100.0

Cross-Tabulation -- File: P1973-93

ntrols:
3)REGION : EAST
Row Var.: 16)CONGRESS Column Var.: 1)YEAR

	1973	1993	Missing	TOTAL
GREAT DEAL	81	9	0	90
	24.1	10.5		21.3
ONLY SOME	207	38	0	245
	61.6	44.2		58.1
HARDLY ANY	48	39	0	87
	14.3	45.3		20.6
Missing	7	56	0	63
TOTAL	336	86	0	422
	100.0	100.0		100.0

Cross-Tabulation -- File: P1973-93

ntrols:
3)REGION : MIDWEST
Row Var.: 16)CONGRESS Column Var.: 1)YEAR

	1973	1993	Missing	TOTAL
GREAT DEAL	86	14	0	100
	20.5	9.2		17.5
ONLY SOME	264	86	0	350
	63.0	56.2		61.2
HARDLY ANY	69	53	0	122
	16.5	34.6		21.3
Missing	9	82	0	91
TOTAL	419	153	0	572
	100.0	100.0		100.0

Cross-Tabulation -- File: P1973-93

ntrols:
3)REGION : SOUTH
Row Var.: 16)CONGRESS Column Var.: 1)YEAR

	1973	1993	Missing	TOTAL
GREAT DEAL	133	13	0	146
	29.1	7.8		23.4
ONLY SOME	267	87	0	354
	58.4	52.4		56.8
HARDLY ANY	57	66	0	123
	12.5	39.8		19.7
Missing	23	99	0	122
TOTAL	457	166	0	623
	100.0	100.0		100.0

Cross-Tabulation -- File: P1973-93

ntrols:
3)REGION : WEST
Row Var.: 16)CONGRESS Column Var.: 1)YEAR

	1973	1993	Missing	TOTAL
GREAT DEAL	52	2	0	54
	21.1	1.8		15.0
ONLY SOME	145	53	0	198
	58.9	46.9		55.2
HARDLY ANY	49	58	0	107
	19.9	51.3		29.8
Missing	7	55	0	62
TOTAL	246	113	0	359
	100.0	100.0		100.0

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ntrols:
2)RACE : WHITE

Row Var.: 16)CONGRESS Column Var.: 1)YEAR

	1973	1993	Missing	TOTAL
GREAT DEAL	327	57	0	384
	25.7	6.6		17.9
ONLY SOME	765	438	0	1203
	60.1	50.5		56.2
HARDLY ANY	180	373	0	553
	14.2	43.0		25.8
Missing	36	479	0	515
TOTAL	1272	868	0	2140
	100.0	100.0		100.0

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ntrols:
2)RACE : AFRICAN-AM
Row Var.: 16)CONGRESS Column Var.: 1)YEAR

	1973	1993	Missing	TOTAL
GREAT DEAL	24	11	0	35
	13.8	9.8		12.2
ONLY SOME	109	59	0	168
	62.6	52.7		58.7
HARDLY ANY	41	42	0	83
	23.6	37.5		29.0
Missing	9	67	0	76
TOTAL	174	112	0	286
	100.0	100.0		100.0

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ıtrols:
5) PARTY : DEMOCRAT
Row Var.: 16) CONGRESS Column Var.: 1) YEAR

	1973	1993	Missing	TOTAL
GREAT DEAL	208	41	0	249
	26.4	8.5		19.6
ONLY SOME	471	272	0	743
	59.8	56.2		58.5
HARDLY ANY	108	171	0	279
	13.7	35.3		22.0
Missing	19	254	0	273
TOTAL	787	484	0	1271
	100.0	100.0		100.0

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.ıtrols:
5) PARTY : INDEPEND.
Row Var.: 16) CONGRESS Column Var.: 1) YEAR

	1973	1993	Missing	TOTAL
GREAT DEAL	21	8	0	29
	14.9	6.3		10.8
ONLY SOME	95	64	0	159
	67.4	50.4		59.3
HARDLY ANY	25	55	0	80
	17.7	43.3		29.9
Missing	2	78	0	80
TOTAL	141	127	0	268
	100.0	100.0		100.0

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ntrols:
5) PARTY : REPUBLICAN
Row Var.: 16) CONGRESS Column Var.: 1) YEAR

	1973	1993	Missing	TOTAL
GREAT DEAL	117	24	0	141
	24.9	6.0		16.2
ONLY SOME	280	185	0	465
	59.7	45.9		53.3
HARDLY ANY	72	194	0	266
	15.4	48.1		30.5
Missing	13	234	0	247
TOTAL	469	403	0	872
	100.0	100.0		100.0

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ntrols:
4)AGE : UNDER 30
Row Var.: 13)EX.BRANCH Column Var.: 1)YEAR

	1973	1993	Missing	TOTAL
GREAT DEAL	93	24	0	117
	24.6	13.1		20.9
ONLY SOME	187	99	0	286
	49.5	54.1		51.0
HARDLY ANY	98	60	0	158
	25.9	32.8		28.2
Missing	5	119	0	124
TOTAL	378	183	0	561
	100.0	100.0		100.0

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ntrols:
4)AGE : 30-50
Row Var.: 13)EX.BRANCH Column Var.: 1)YEAR

	1973	1993	Missing	TOTAL
GREAT DEAL	157	64	0	221
	29.5	13.6		22.1
ONLY SOME	288	242	0	530
	54.1	51.5		52.9
HARDLY ANY	87	164	0	251
	16.4	34.9		25.0
Missing	10	241	0	251
TOTAL	532	470	0	1002
	100.0	100.0		100.0

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ntrols:
4)AGE : 50 & OVER
Row Var.: 13)EX.BRANCH Column Var.: 1)YEAR

	1973	1993	Missing	TOTAL
GREAT DEAL	189	36	0	225
	34.1	9.8		24.4
ONLY SOME	276	214	0	490
	49.7	58.5		53.2
HARDLY ANY	90	116	0	206
	16.2	31.7		22.4
Missing	20	222	0	242
TOTAL	555	366	0	921
	100.0	100.0		100.0

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ntrols:
3)REGION : EAST
Row Var.: 13)EX.BRANCH Column Var.: 1)YEAR

	1973	1993	Missing	TOTAL
GREAT DEAL	92	17	0	109
	27.5	19.5		25.9
ONLY SOME	177	38	0	215
	53.0	43.7		51.1
HARDLY ANY	65	32	0	97
	19.5	36.8		23.0
Missing	9	55	0	64
TOTAL	334	87	0	421
	100.0	100.0		100.0

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Controls:
3)REGION : MIDWEST
Row Var.: 13)EX.BRANCH Column Var.: 1)YEAR

	1973	1993	Missing	TOTAL
GREAT DEAL	109	16	0	125
	25.9	10.6		21.9
ONLY SOME	233	100	0	333
	55.3	66.2		58.2
HARDLY ANY	79	35	0	114
	18.8	23.2		19.9
Missing	7	84	0	91
TOTAL	421	151	0	572
	100.0	100.0		100.0

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ntrols:
3)REGION : SOUTH
Row Var.: 13)EX.BRANCH Column Var.: 1)YEAR

	1973	1993	Missing	TOTAL
GREAT DEAL	171	15	0	186
	36.8	9.2		29.6
ONLY SOME	225	85	0	310
	48.4	52.1		49.4
HARDLY ANY	69	63	0	132
	14.8	38.7		21.0
Missing	15	102	0	117
TOTAL	465	163	0	628
	100.0	100.0		100.0

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ntrols:
3)REGION : WEST
Row Var.: 13)EX.BRANCH Column Var.: 1)YEAR

	1973	1993	Missing	TOTAL
GREAT DEAL	67	14	0	81
	26.9	12.4		22.4
ONLY SOME	120	61	0	181
	48.2	54.0		50.0
HARDLY ANY	62	38	0	100
	24.9	33.6		27.6
Missing	4	55	0	59
TOTAL	249	113	0	362
	100.0	100.0		100.0

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Controls:
2)RACE : WHITE
Row Var.: 13)EX.BRANCH Column Var.: 1)YEAR

	1973	1993	Missing	TOTAL
GREAT DEAL	414	95	0	509
	32.4	11.1		23.8
ONLY SOME	651	472	0	1123
	50.9	54.9		52.5
HARDLY ANY	214	292	0	506
	16.7	34.0		23.7
Missing	29	488	0	517
TOTAL	1279	859	0	2138
	100.0	100.0		100.0

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ntrols:
2)RACE : AFRICAN-AM
Row Var.: 13)EX.BRANCH Column Var.: 1)YEAR

	1973	1993	Missing	TOTAL
GREAT DEAL	23	17	0	40
	12.9	15.3		13.8
ONLY SOME	97	59	0	156
	54.5	53.2		54.0
HARDLY ANY	58	35	0	93
	32.6	31.5		32.2
Missing	5	68	0	73
TOTAL	178	111	0	289
	100.0	100.0		100.0

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ntrols:
5) PARTY : DEMOCRAT
Row Var.: 13) EX.BRANCH Column Var.: 1) YEAR

	1973	1993	Missing	TOTAL
GREAT DEAL	179	80	0	259
	22.8	16.8		20.5
ONLY SOME	412	263	0	675
	52.5	55.3		53.5
HARDLY ANY	194	133	0	327
	24.7	27.9		25.9
Missing	21	262	0	283
TOTAL	785	476	0	1261
	100.0	100.0		100.0

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ntrols:
5) PARTY : INDEPEND.
Row Var.: 13) EX.BRANCH Column Var.: 1) YEAR

	1973	1993	Missing	TOTAL
GREAT DEAL	29	15	0	44
	20.6	11.6		16.3
ONLY SOME	85	65	0	150
	60.3	50.4		55.6
HARDLY ANY	27	49	0	76
	19.1	38.0		28.1
Missing	2	76	0	78
TOTAL	141	129	0	270
	100.0	100.0		100.0

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ntrols:
5) PARTY : REPUBLICAN
Row Var.: 13) EX.BRANCH Column Var.: 1) YEAR

	1973	1993	Missing	TOTAL
GREAT DEAL	218	29	0	247
	45.9	7.2		28.2
ONLY SOME	223	221	0	444
	46.9	55.1		50.7
HARDLY ANY	34	151	0	185
	7.2	37.7		21.1
Missing	7	236	0	243
TOTAL	475	401	0	876
	100.0	100.0		100.0

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